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## Book Review: Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success

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# Book Review: Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success

by Patricia Sobczak

## Introduction

Author Adam Grant is the youngest full professor and single highest-rated teacher at The Wharton School. He has been honored as one of the world's top forty business professors under forty by *Poets & Quants* (Carter, 2011). Described by his peers as a wunderkind, Grant holds a Ph.D. in organizational psychology from the University of Michigan and B.A. from Harvard University. Grant has also written several other books including *The Originals: How non-conformists move the world* (2017), and *Option B: Facing adversity, building resilience and finding joy* (2017) with Sheryl Sandberg.

In *Give and take: Why helping others drives our success* (2013) Grant shares his and others' research regarding who is more successful in business and in life – givers or takers. The answer may surprise you. He breaks down behaviors into three categories – Givers, Takers and Matchers. Grant provides extensive definitions of each of these behaviors and how they show up at work and in life. He goes on to explore the dangers and rewards of giving more than you get. Grant ultimately concludes that it is our interactions with others that determine our success. He supports this with research, well-documented stories, and real-life examples.

## Summary

Grant challenges the reader to set aside preconceived notions about successful people and consider the evidence that supports the argument that givers are more successful than takers. Grant's approach is quite different from other authors

also writing about how to find success in work and life. For example, Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People" (1936) and Napoleon Hill's "Think and Grow Rich" (1937) offers simple and fundamental self-help advice. In contrast, Grant utilizes several forms of research to underpin his conclusion.

To get to that conclusion, Grant has organized the chapters to scaffold the evidence of his arguments in a coherent and measured manner while offering healthy doses of research-based studies and anecdotes along the way. Grant's use of real-life cases supports his assertions in ways that relate to people. For instance, Adam Rifkin, the entrepreneur who is profiled in the book, believes that "anyone should be willing to do something that will take you five minutes or less for anybody!" Rifkin is a giver and touts that as one of the reasons why he is so successful.

## Evaluation/Analysis

Grant does a good job of not placing a value judgement on being a giver, taker or matcher other than to show how their mindsets inform their actions. He offers objective descriptions that help the reader identify the characteristics of each type, what that might look like in familiar situations and how to shift to another stance if needed. For example, he posits that garden-variety takers are not cruel or cut-throat; they are just cautious and self-protective. Grant asserts that givers who give without the thought of their own needs can be self-destructive and that matchers keep score and only give to even the score.

In addition, two of Grant's assertions in the book

emphasize what he is trying to show. The first is to shift a common notion that those who are friendly and outgoing are always givers and that those who are grumpy and more standoffish are always takers. He gives examples of each to help the reader understand that *nice is not always good*, a lesson that has played out in most of our lives. I am sure we can all remember a time or two when someone initially seemed nice and we trusted them only to discover that they were just in it for themselves. As Grant notes, "When takers win, there's usually someone else who loses" (p. 10). According to Grant, successful givers are every bit as ambitious as takers and matchers but they simply have a different way of pursuing their goals.

The other important premise is understanding that there is a *right* kind of giving. Giving without any thought to your own well-being is like becoming a doormat and is the giver's worst nightmare. Grant uses the term *otherish* to explain how the most successful givers are those who give but are also in tune with their own needs. "Being otherish means being willing to give more than you receive, but still keeping your own interests in sight, using them as a guide for choosing where, when and how and to whom you give" (p. 158). Because otherish givers are interested in the success of others, they tend to focus on what is best for the organization in the long term and not let their egos get the best of them. If they find out they have made a mistake, they are willing to take the hit on their reputation if it helps the organization move forward. Interestingly, research shows that people who fall into the otherish giver category, who routinely offer their time and experience to support colleagues, end up earning more raises and promotions. Of course, we have all known the hard-charging colleague, a taker, who vaults up the promotion ladder and then leaves quickly for the next big opportunity so it is important to note that being a giver may not

be a good strategy for the 100-yard dash, but is valuable in a marathon.

Another example of otherish giving is engaging in generous tit for tat. Whereas selfless givers make the mistake of trusting others all the time, otherish givers start out with trust as a default assumption, but they are willing to adjust their reciprocity styles in exchanges with someone who appears to be a taker by action or reputation.

These and other examples make up the main focus of the book showing that giving is better than matching or taking, at work and in life.

## Conclusion

Grant's book is filled with numerous examples and research that support his premise that givers are more successful than takers or matchers. One criticism of Grant's book is that otherish giving, the key aspect of giver success, does not appear until the second half of the book. This delay leaves the reader with the impression that all givers, not just otherish givers, are more successful, when clearly that is not the case. Grant's theory would be stronger if he had chosen to introduce otherish giving earlier and to better distinguish between giving and otherish giving.

Even so, Grant's work does help to shift our thinking about giving and taking and helps the reader understand that otherish givers really are poised for success and that all of us need to explore this concept in our lives. Grant does point out many more people than we may realize are givers and want to act in that manner both at work and in their private lives.

Grant's book sheds new and well-researched light on how to be more successful. His approach allows the reader to find themselves in many of the stories and studies and therefore helps to demystify the process of success and gives us all

a chance to practice some of these new ideas in our own situations.

I highly recommend the book for all of the reasons mentioned throughout this review. We need more givers in our professional lives and Grant provides a roadmap towards what that may look like and how it could play out in all of our lives. Otherish giving is good, it is right and it is needed. Go forth and give!

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